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Role and Influence of Social Media on the PR Industry: Uses and Opportunities in UAE

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The industry of public relations (PR) within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is lagging corresponding to the advancements which are happening in the external world. In this context, social media has been regarded to be the primary catalyst in terms of pushing the PR industry of the UAE to cope with the continuous alterations of the external environment. The research initially included secondary research where qualitative data has been collected for drawing hypotheses regarding the impact of social media on the public relations industry of the UAE. The Mixed method of data collection has been done using face to face interviews and surveys based on questionnaires sets. Based on the findings, the MODE method has been implemented for finding out the central tendencies of the responses, and thematic analysis has been performed. It has been analyzed and concluded that social media does impact in a highly positive manner in the industry of public relations of the UAE.

Keywords: Impact, PR industry, social media, UAE

The concept of public relations (PR) refers to the practices done to manage the distribution of information among individuals and organizations all over the world. It mainly encompasses discussion about the aspects which correspond to the individuals of the organizations focusing on gaining exposure before the public using several topics related to the interests communicating to the audience and utilizing news (Grunig, 2013). These factors do not include any sort of direct methods of payment invested by the audience.

Marketing communication has been the differentiating factor between the communal measures of advertisements and the feature of public relations. The primary objective of public relations is to establish an adequate level of the idea for generating a proper level of attention towards the customers without any expected money return. This is where public relations can be considered unique in comparison to advertising and other forms of conventional marketing approaches.

The face of public relations has undergone multiple changes with the advent of newer technologies like artificial intelligence (Biswal, 2020). Sometimes PR tools in the forms of visuals and images in Twitter are being used for propaganda and governmental agenda in Middle Eastern countries (Ebrahim & Seo, 2019). The industry of PR of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been facing a dramatic level of changes during the past few years. The primary reasons behind it are the advancements in technology, as well as the channels of media. It has been coming up with different types of opportunities matching communication with various businesses and clients (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 2006).

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The primary reason for this occurrence is about the high-level emergence of the concept of social media through which networking between the customers and the organizations can be done efficiently and quickly.

The customers get the scope to remain engaged in two-way communication with the organizations. In terms of the businesses, it poses a significant level of challenge in terms of effectively handling the different innovative forms of these engagements. Based on this, the importance corresponding to public relations can be figured out as a significant part of the organizational functions. On the contrary, social media still poses an exceptional level of challenge for the public relations industry of UAE. The study will focus on researching the new forms of developments and figuring out an insight of comprehensive nature into the impacts of social media on the industry of public relations of the UAE.

At an approximate level, 79% of the total population of the world access social media in some way or the other. This is where the PR industry of the UAE can avail the benefit of spreading awareness to such a large amount of customers using the Web 2.0 framework of social media. It does not demand any sort of investments to be made, and the overall spreading of information takes place at a very rapid rate (Flew, 2007). The style of communication using talking and listening within the companies has turned out to be outdated. The only approach which can be looked forward is about arranging dialogues with the different types of direct and indirect stakeholders due to the high-level rise of the concept of social media (Couldry, 2012). Social media has led to changes in the opinions of consumers in terms of making decisions. Also, it further refers to the fact that new techniques and tools are necessary for meeting the requirements and the needs of the customers. This is where social media plays a significant part in terms of raising digital media, which leads to the transformation of the communication channels along with the practice of journalism. These parameters are expected to impact in an enormously positive manner on the public relations industry of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Literature Review

Theaker (2016) has found that almost 78% of all the people working in the PR industry consider social media to be a mandatory aspect for conducting the operations corresponding to the public relations industry. They would not be able to execute the actions until and unless they got assistance from the different tools and techniques of social media. The next parameter identified is that 69% of the professionals had stated the point that social media is an important parameter linked to the functions of the PR industry regularly. Besides, 78% of the journalists had regarded social media to be a fundamental consideration in terms of accomplishing their job objectives from another standpoint (Theaker, 2016). Lastly, 48% of the PR officials have stated that social media is entirely reliable, and they do not require counter checking the facts acquired from those platforms.

Curtis et al. (2010) identified the platforms of social media influences on the industry of public relations using leveraging the communication level along with ties with the audience. It facilitates executing interactions of direct nature between the people and the organization present within the industry. The communal platforms of social media which get used by different types of individuals are Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms facilitate the PR industry with different kinds of tools of marketing, which are very much advanced (Curtis et al., 2010). These tools help the organizations to conduct marketing using advertising within the industry to spread

awareness before the targeted customers.

As stated above, it can be discussed that the PR industry of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) can accomplish a better level of interactions with their customers and generate a proper level of relationship with them using posting several advertisements and other updates on the platforms of social media for spreading awareness among them. Moreover, the industry can even be able to conserve the right amount of investment in the context of marketing (Al-Jenaibi, 2013). Utilizing social media platforms, they can reach up to targeted customers quite easily without investing much. Social media provides the opportunity to post free advertisements on different platforms, and in case of promotions, a minimal amount of money is required to be invested by the organizations.

Austin (2010) has demonstrated on the feature that social media influences on the industry of public relations through engaging and creating unique natured contents. It has been figured out that the extent of inquisitiveness among the readers throughout the world is pretty much excellent, and they are very much eager to go through the different information circling all around. This is where the author mentioned that social media plays a significant hand in terms of generating a proper platform for the organizations within the PR industry to post unique featured subjects for attracting the attention of the consumer bases. This is how the industry can engage the audience towards it in large numbers (Austin, 2010). The primary factor which turns this relationship into a positive direction is the different types of unique blogs posted by the PR industry on the platforms of various social media websites.

Based on this parameter, the public relations industry present in the UAE can be able to attract a large number of customers towards the organizations. It can leverage the level of interest of the customers using unique content, which they can post on social media websites. This will help in spreading the right level of awareness among the audiences, and as a result, the customer base of the industry will get increased significantly. This will make the PR industry more popular among the people of the UAE, and also among the people of other countries of the world (Kirat, 2007). A good relationship with the people will profoundly enhance the reputation level of the industry, and so will increase the reliability proportion as well.

On the other hand, Duhé (2007) has stated that social media comprises different types of elements that broaden the opportunities of the companies which work under the PR industry. The author has highlighted the influences and the impacts of social media on the functioning of the public relations industry. The variety of elements of social media that broadens the overall scopes of the industry has been a triggering factor for implementing this in the operations.

The integration of social media mainly takes place in departments like advertising, digital marketing, and big data for producing an extensive suite before the vast masses of customers (Duhé, 2007). The author has even forecasted that the impact of social media will go on increasing, and so will the integrations within the functions of the PR industries throughout the world. Improved thinking, along with making decisions, will be the significant outcomes for the officials within the industry. These ideas can take the shape of game turners for the organizations along with their linked clients shortly. As stated, the industry of public relations within the UAE can integrate the different tools and mechanisms of social media for enhancing the level of business functions (Al-Jenaibi, 2014). It can even be figured out that social media will not only assist the organizations towards achieving the PR objectives but also in different types of domains present within the organization and the department working on other functions to the maximum extent.

Another parameter has been considered by Smith (2010), regarding the infrastructure linked to the PR industries all over the world. It has been figured out that the high level of transformation has taken place during the last few years. The commonly witnessed ones are the advanced methods of communication using technologies that have taken place at a rapid level. A significant driver for all the changes has been social media, and the impacts are quite evident in terms of the industry of public relations. Social media has played the role of transforming the communication approaches and eliminated the place and time constraints of communication for the industry. The industry has been able to spread awareness among the broad masses of customers, quite efficiently, using social media. This is how the industry has been able to develop appropriate relationships with the large masses of customers.

In addition to it, the mechanism of feedback from the customers, which gets integrated using social media, has turned out to be another milestone for the industry of public relations. The customers had the opportunity to provide their reviews of both negative and positive nature. This is how their requirements and demands get fulfilled by the industry. The reason behind it is that the industry takes adequate measures based on the feedback received through social media platforms (Smith, 2010). They mainly put attention on the negative reviews or the complaints about assessing the drawbacks and taking appropriate measures for mitigating it.

Based on the above-stated discussion, it can be mentioned that the PR industry of the UAE can make the betterment of the entire business functions utilizing social media. They will get to know about the exact demands and the complaints of the customers and based on which they will be able to take the appropriate measures for satisfying their requirements and also their psychological parameters. This will also make the organizations within the PR industry to identify the exact shortcomings and taking proper steps for the prevention of degradation of the industry.

Another parameter that has been highlighted in this scenario is the news cycle, which goes on altering all over the world regularly. In this context, Reese, Gandy Jr, and Grant (2001) had stated that social media could turn out to be highly fruitful due to its 24/7 availability. The PR industries all over the world can stay updated, employing the different platforms of social media due to its continuously updating news cycle. The sector of public relations can acquire appropriate details and information about the situations of the external environment and, based on which they can apply different strategies for betterment. They can even get precautions using the new cycle of social media regarding any obstacles. In addition to it, social media is a pretty inexpensive and affordable parameter, to be integrated within the businesses of the industries (Reese, Gandy Jr, & Grant, 2001). This is the reason why even the small and medium-sized enterprises or the SMEs present within the PR industries can incorporate the services of public relations (PR) within their organizational premises.

There are almost 60% of organizations that fall under the small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) category in the United Arab Emirates. Due to the affordable property of social media, all of these organizations can be able to implement the parameters of public relations for attracting more and more customers and enhancing the level of business. Till now, it has been noted that the introduction of social media into the public relations industry of the UAE has led to the rise of activities corresponding to public relations by 24%. The reason behind it is that social media assisted the organizations in communicating with the customer bases and developing a proper relationship with them. Through spreading awareness, they have been able to attract these customers in large numbers. This study

aims at finding out the impacts and the influences of social media on the industry of public relations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the objectives are: (i) to recognize the importance of social media on the parameter of customer focus in the industry of public relations of the United Arab Emirates, (ii) to figure out the affordability parameter of social media within the SMEs of the UAE, and (iii) to identify the betterment in the level of integration within the industry of public relations via social media in the UAE.

Methodology

The research mainly focuses on the Pragmatism philosophy of research. The reason behind choosing this philosophy is that to find the impacts of social media on the PR industry in the UAE, not specific parameters can be emphasized. Instead, it requires to be considered as a concept and the net outputs. It is a combination of Interpretive and Positivism philosophy. The deductive approach of research is discussed in this case for figuring out the influences of social media on the PR industry. It aids in understanding the impacts in a comprehensive manner. Observations of the responses of the individuals will be considered for finding out the outcomes. Objectivity will be a significant focusing area in this study. The survey method is adopted here. Primary data collection is done by providing questionnaire sets to the sample participants. The Mixed method is comprising of both qualitative and quantitative approaches are considered for incorporating statistical and informative data collection and analysis.

The data collection is accomplished via questionnaire sets comprising of close-ended questions for quantitative collection data, and the qualitative data are get collected via face-to-face interviews. The qualitative data is analyzed using the thematic analysis, whereas, the MODE method is applied for finding out the central tendencies of the responses, for analyzing the quantitative data. The purpose of non-probabilistic sampling will be used and, based on which 200 mass communication students of Abu Dhabi University have been chosen for the survey, and four representatives from the industry for the face-to-face interview. Data confidentiality and privacy will be maintained by applying the regulations of the Data Security Act, and the Data Protection Act (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the MODE method along with finding out the central tendencies from the number of responses from the sample participants, it can be stated as per the identified parameter from the initial question that, social media can be regarded as the necessary or the mandatory setting for the functions of the PR industry of the United Arab Emirates. The findings of the first question, it was identified that 179 of the 200 respondents have agreed that social media is a mandatory feature for the PR industry, and only 21 respondents disagree. The majority of respondents have agreed to the first question.

The response of the second question regarding the benefits of social media, of the 24/7 news channel within the aspect of social media, it was identified that 182 respondents think the 24/7 news channel has benefitted the PR industry to prosper significantly. This facilitates to remain highly updated with the regular occurrences taking place in the external world. This will also help the PR industry to become updated and stay in touch with the customers to meet their requirements in terms of satisfaction and enhancing the business base. This will highly benefit the PR industry to prosper significantly.

As per the responses generated from the third question, if social media enhanced the focus of consumers on the UAE's PR industry, it can be analyzed that 133 respondents

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who represent the majority, agreed to the fact that social media has profoundly enhanced the overall level of focus on the customers using the PR industry. Social media helps the industry to remain connected with the different segments of customers all over the region. This facilitates them in conducting the right level of communication, along with establishing proper relationships with them. As a result, it helps in spreading awareness to a great extent, and the reputation of the industry also gets better, due to the increase in the number of customer bases via proper marketing and advertising.

The fourth question, whether the social media enhanced the communication and customer relationship in the PR Industry of the country, 180 respondents, who represent the majority, agree with the significant focus that social media has increased the level of communication along with customer relationship within the PR industry. This leads to spreading awareness among large masses of customers for spreading appropriate information for the customers regarding the operations of the public relations within the UAE. This leads to an increase in the level of communication and the betterment of the customer relationship.

The fifth question regarding the impact of social media on the operations of the public relations industry, it emphasizes on the aspects of affordability of implementing social media on the generation of PR departments for the SMEs within the UAE. It can be found that the tools and techniques within social media are almost free, so SMEs can implement that for incorporating the PR operations. The only investment required to be done in the social media platforms is during the times of extra promotion of the posted contents. One hundred eighty-nine people agree that SME's find social media to be affordable for the PR Industry.

In the last question, in terms of the context of integration corresponding to social media, the PR industry highly gets benefitted by the social media platform. It mainly provides the scope of integrating different types of tools within the operations of the public relations industry for making betterment of their activities taking place within the organizations. The result shows that despite 140 people agreeing in terms of integration via social media, 60 people are ambiguous in this aspect.

Also, we conducted face to face interviews, and we analyzed the responses. As a result, it turned out that social media is a mandatory factor for the operations of the PR industry. The reason behind it is that it remains active 24/7, and generates adequate information about the external environmental parameters.

Moreover, the tools and techniques of social media are very much affordable for the PR industry to conduct their operations. Social media turns out to be an essential tool for advertising and marketing on behalf of the PR organizations for spreading awareness among the customers. Lastly, in the case of the trustworthy parameter of social media, the views had been mixed as obtained from the different respondents of the face-to-face interview. Despite social media acquiring different types of privacy parameters, it has been noted that quite a few loopholes of data breaching and leakage are already present in this aspect. Moreover, quite a few amounts of artificial materials also remain present within the platforms of social media, which may lead the PR industry on the wrong track. The study has found that social media is a significant parameter in the context of operations within the PR industry of the United Arab Emirates. From the primary and secondary sources, the study found that social media is a platform that remains 24/7 active and can be accessed from different types of devices having Internet connections. Besides, the research suggests SMEs within the region can also establish PR departments due to the highly affordable social media access.

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